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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KINGSTON 001273

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SENSITIVE

STATE FOR CMS, SES/O, DS/IP/WHA, DS/IP/SPC FOR JIM SPOO, WHA/CAR
(KHARNE/RBUDDEN), USSOUTHCOM FOR BILL VANCIO
TASKFORCE DEAN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ASEC CASC EAID JM
SUBJECT: JAMAICA: Sitrep #4

Summary

1.(U) As of August 20, 2007, Hurricane Dean has passed Jamaica and is moving on towards the Yucatan Peninsula. Initial reports are in from personnel stationed in different parts of Kingston, and while damage has been seen in some areas, no reports of catastrophic events have been received. Power and water remain off for most of the island at this time. According to Jamaica Public Service (JPS) sources the main power grid, which includes the New Embassy Compound (NEC), may be restored as early as Monday afternoon, August 20. End Summary.

The NEC and Immediate Surroundings

2.(SBU) The New Embassy Compound (NEC) is holding out well, with minor damage to some fourth floor window frames and a small amount of water leaking through to the floor. With a few minor interruptions, phone service for both landlines and cellular service is working, and internet access is also without interruption. RSO reports all cameras and lights appear to be working, no damage to NEC security measures. As of 1100 hours on August 20, only minor water leakage, and damage to trees and landscaping on the grounds of the NEC has been reported. The RSO is working with other Agencies, as well as the Jamaican Constabulary Force (JCF) to send out damage assessment teams to all Embassy residential housing areas, as well as the streets of Kingston. As of 1200 hours local time on August 20, the RSO reports that most major roads connecting the NEC to Embassy Residential Housing, including Powell Plaza, are open and free of large debris. JCF contacts have received no reports of looting or violence in the neighborhoods surrounding Embassy Residential Housing, and the curfew was lifted at 0600 hours on August 20.

3.(U) The Jamaican Public Service Company (JPS) reports that they have assessment teams out to determine how many power lines and poles are down or damaged. JPS had already begun a program of replacing more vulnerable wooden power poles with concrete polls, so damage is expected to be less than in previous hurricanes. Also, due to the modernization program, JPS has a large stock of concrete power poles and other spare parts, which should assist in speeding up repairs. A JPS source reports that they hope to restore power to the main grid late August 20, or by early morning August 21 at the latest. The main grid encompasses the NEC, as well as several major hospitals and emergency services in Kingston.

Reports from around Kingston

3.(U) Jamaican Radio reports that the Governor General (GG) of Jamaica has declared a state of emergency for 30 days and that the Commissioner of Elections is still considering whether to postpone

the early voting for police officers and military personnel, which is scheduled for Tuesday, August 21. No reports have been received on the National Elections, which are scheduled for August 27. Jamaican Radio also reports that the road to Kingston's Manley International Airport is virtually impassable, boulders and sand cover the road, and only well-equipped four-wheel drive vehicles are able to pass. British Airways (BA) is announcing the August 20 BA flight from Manley Airport to London is now scheduled to depart at 1530 hours local time on Tuesday, August 21.

Reports from Outside Kingston

4.(U) American Citizen Services (ACS) reports very few inquiries received, and initial surveys showing that hotels were fairing well, no reports of injuries or problems with American Citizens. ACS officers stationed in Montego Bay report the storm effects on the North Coast were relatively light, with little damage or problems seen at the major hotels. ACS is receiving a low number of telephone calls from the US with requests for welfare and whereabouts of American Citizens. Since telephone and internet services are functioning well, most American Tourists are able to contact family and friends directly, without assistance from ACS. Initial reports from the Consular Officer in the Cayman Islands are that most Americans and locals were able to find seats on chartered flights and depart the island prior to the storm. However, the storm was passing far-enough away from the Caymans, so the effects were not severe, and no reports of damage have been received. British and Canadian High Commission sources report that Sangster International Airport in Montego Bay will likely be re-opened in the afternoon of Monday, August 20. Jamaican Radio reports that Sangster International Airport will open at 12:00 pm, August 20. The airlines are meeting to make plans. Continental Airlines has cancelled all flights from Montego Bay for Monday, August 20, Air

KINGSTON 00001273 002 OF 002

Jamaica may have a flight departing in the late afternoon on August 20, but this has not been confirmed.

5.(U) The eastern side of the island appears hardest hit with reports of severe damage to roads and property as well as land slides. Several rural communities are reportedly cut off in St. Thomas and Clarendon (including Portland Cottage, an area severely damaged three years ago by Hurricane Ivan). In Kingston, there were no reports of serious flooding, largely thanks to a recent, expensive drain-and-gully cleaning exercise ordered by the Mayor. East Kingston and other seaside communities suffered major storm surge and flooding from the sea. Efforts are being made to clear the airport road which was blocked by up to two feet of sand.

6.(U) The Prime Minister has called an emergency meeting of the Cabinet for 1:00 pm Monday, to be followed by a press briefing. Meanwhile, all major towns remain under a curfew due to end at 6:00 pm on Monday. A senior political officer quoted on radio said that only three incidents of looting have so far been reported in Kingston. However, callers in radio talk shows report hearing gunfire in several volatile areas of Kingston, including Mountain View, Craig Town, and Greenwich Town. These events may be related to gang-related activities in those areas.

JOHNSON